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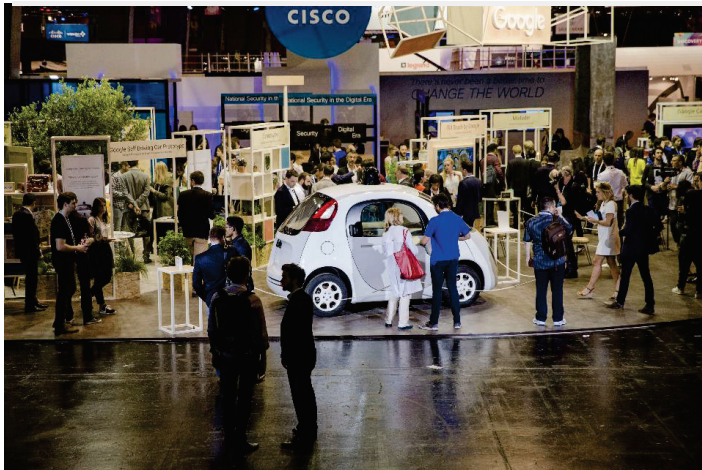
Google Spins Off Self-Driving Car Unit As 'Waymo'

**Alan Ohnsman**, FORBES STAFF ✓*Thumbing a ride at the intersection of technology, autos and mobility* [FULL BIO](#) ✓

Google's self-driving car group, which helped ignite a race among automakers and tech firms to develop cars that drive themselves, is spinning off as a stand-alone unit dubbed [Waymo](#).

“We’re now an independent company within the Alphabet umbrella,” John Krafcik, chief executive of the new company, said at a press conference in San Francisco today.





Attendees inspect a Google self-driving car that's now part of Waymo's test fleet, at a conference in Paris in June. (Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg)



*Krafcik, a veteran automotive executive with decades of experience at Ford and Hyundai Motor, was recruited in September 2015 to help the R&D project within Google's X tech skunkworks transition to being a revenue-generating business. [Chris Urmson](#), a robotics scientist who'd previously led the program for Google for six years, departed earlier this year and is [reported to be](#) planning his own self-driving technology company.

Underscoring the sophistication of its system, the company today revealed that it conducted the world's first fully autonomous ride with a passenger, back in October 2015, in a car with no steering wheel or gas and brake pedals. The sole passenger was Steve Mahan, who is legally blind, and the ride in Austin, Texas, took him from a city park to a doctor's office as the car made its way through residential neighborhoods.

"This ride was possible because our cars can now handle the most difficult driving tasks,

unpredictable humans will do on the road," Krafcik said in a [post on Medium.com](#).



The new Waymo logo.

While Google was an early leader in popularizing the vision of vehicles driven by artificial intelligence rather than a human, it now faces intense competition to commercialize the technology. Uber, the ride-hailing giant, this year acquired robot-trucking tech developer Otto, a company begun by Google alumni, and has set a goal of getting autonomous vehicles into its fleet as soon as possible.

Likewise, Elon Musk is pushing Tesla Motors to be a leader in driverless car technology and has begun equipping all of its electric vehicles with sensors and computing power intended to automate control of driving functions. Automakers including Ford, General Motors, Nissan, BMW, Audi, Volvo, Toyota and others are all pouring funds into their own automated vehicle programs.

Apple has indicated that it's also developing self-driving vehicle tech, though the

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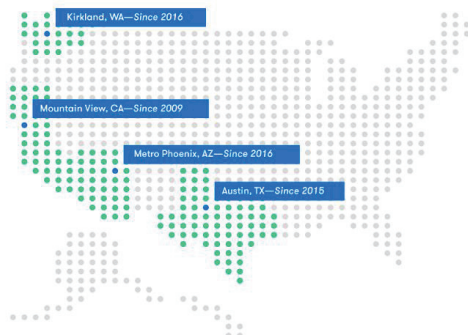
AMERICAN EXPRESS **TRAVEL**

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U.S. regulators are working to develop basic national guidelines for the testing and deployment of driverless vehicles, unveiling a preliminary policy in September, and Google has been a key member of an industry group pushing for standards.

Waymo is currently equipping a fleet of 100 hybrid Chrysler minivans with its sensors and computing gear that will soon join about 60 prototype autonomous vehicles being tested in Silicon Valley, Austin, Kirkland, Washington, and Phoenix, Arizona.



Waymo test cities (Waymo)

The company hasn't yet disclosed when and how it will begin generating revenue and Krafcik declined to discuss specific business plans today.

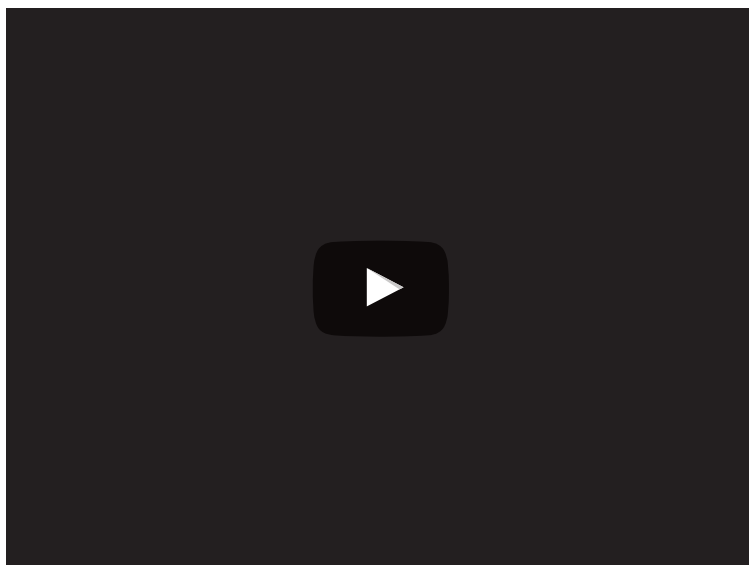
Similarly, he said staffing for Waymo is currently higher than it was a year ago, but gave no specific figures. Waymo will continue to be headquartered in Mountain View, California, Krafcik said.

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conducted **2.3 million miles** of real-world autonomous driving. Since Google began testing driverless vehicle systems in 2009, its technology has advanced to the point that regular real-world use is getting very close, Krafcik said.

"We are a self-driving technology company. We've been really clear that we are not a car company," Krafcik said. "We are not in the business making better cars, we are in the business of making better drivers."



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*(*The author worked for Krafcik for a year before he went to Google.)*

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